

Truth as revelation in Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenology

Summary

The goal of the dissertation “Truth as revelation in Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenology” is to critically analyze the new concept of truth, developed by Marion. The concept of revelation assumes, according to its etymology, the function of unveiling, and thus the question of truth. Revelation, therefore, is understood by Marion as the highest degree of truth. It is not only about the specific case of religious Revelation or “revealed truth,” but rather about revelation as a universal form of truth. Marion opposes revelation, which he describes as “uncovering,” to the notion of truth, which he describes as *aletheia*, “unconcealment.”

The concept of truth understood as revelation is the culmination of the phenomenology of donation developed by Marion. Therefore, the central motive of revelation—as well as of the phenomenology of donation—is the break with the transcendental subject, which would impose conditions of possibility and range of phenomenality. Therefore, in order to present the truth as revelation, it is necessary to first examine the assumptions, principles, methods, and the path of the development of the phenomenology of donation itself, for which the concept of truth can be the guiding thread.

In the literature on the subject, well researched is the fundamental role of the principle of donation, which can also be understood as the ultimate horizon of rationality and the instance that triggers the reduction leading to it, previously confined to the horizon of subject or being. In the horizon of donation, no longer constrained by the transcendental subject or the horizon of being, Marion describes the “saturated phenomena” in which intuition permeates the concepts and intentions. In our thesis, however, we point out that the phenomenology of donation, understood in this way, makes up a certain element of a larger whole—both at the level of the chronology of Marion's work, as well as within the very assumptions of the phenomenology of donation. This whole can be presented according to the following points:

1. the given is given originally as a paradox. For Marion, paradox as what philosophy at first glance is not able to understand or describe, although it remains universally and perfectly accessible, should be the starting point of philosophy. The goal of philosophy is to make it

possible to see or understand paradoxes as paradoxes. Marion begins his philosophy by analysing the paradoxes such as idol or icon, but also by questioning the limits of metaphysics.

2. In order to perceive and understand the paradox as such, the task of the “broadening of rationality” must be undertaken. As Marion notes, philosophy, unlike other sciences, does not have a fixed limit because it has to find it for itself. This limit is also the limit of rationality, the answer to the question of “what can we know.” Each age must decide within the framework of philosophy what kind of boundaries to set for reason and thus define what is unintelligible. These questions have always been put in the context of successive criticisms and aporias—between unchangeability or change, infinite or finite, impossible or possible, experienceable or not, visible or invisible. Defining these boundaries has always been the stake of philosophy. But it is also necessary to ask who is to define what is possible and what is not, what is experimental and what is not? Should the transcendental subject and his finite reason be the limit, which at the same time allows the conditions *a priori* of experience to be determined, or should another limit be found?

Phenomenology is supposed to differ in its principles from previous metaphysical thinking precisely in that it is the very thing in its immanence that is supposed to define the limits of what is given, from what is not given, and thus the limits of rationality. By pointing to the phenomenological motto “back to the things themselves,” Marion adopts, by its essence, a dynamic interpretation of phenomenology as governed by principle, not doctrine or achievements of a particular phenomenologist. In his opinion, therefore, we can observe in phenomenology a transgression and broadening of the subject matter which Husserl originally set up and is himself already transgressing, and Heidegger continues to make significant changes. Later phenomenologists show further transformations, particularly of the main phenomenological operations, such as the constitution of meaning, intentionality and reduction. In this way, hermeneutics does not negate the constitution of meaning, but rather broadens its field of application. The primacy of ethics does not deny the principle of intentionality, but rather deepens its understanding in counter-intentionality, while reduction finds further and further applications—for example, deconstruction in Derrida

3 This broadening, however, is ultimately supposed to make a “turn” which in the phenomenology of donation is only prepared. This “preparation,” understood as a effort of reduction, although it allows certain phenomena to appear, is also meant to “disappear” in their favour. If the subject carrying out the reduction is not to become a transcendental subject that constitutes the phenomenon, he must rather submit himself to the constitution and the counterintentionality of the phenomenon itself. The reduction, on the other hand, as a “counter-

method,” is to serve only the appearance of the phenomenon itself. The phenomena that are to appear with the turn of reduction in Marion’s philosophy are the phenomena of love and revelation.

The question of the possibility of such a turn of reduction is therefore also a question of the possibility of truth as revelation. The description and analysis of the phenomenology of donation according to these three points leads at the same time to the necessity to indicate the problematic structure or a certain tension contained in the very principle of this phenomenology.

Firstly, the turn seems to be made necessarily at the cost of a certain lack of continuity or a break in the turn, which causes all the descriptions starting from traditional phenomenological notions, still visible in *Being Given*, to somewhat disappear in Marion’s later works—in which the earlier descriptions were supposed to gain full meaning. The descriptions of phenomena such as the face of the Other or living flesh played a certain role in Levinas and Henry in the whole of their philosophy (to which Marion is referring to in particular). The face was inscribed in ethics as the first philosophy, and flesh in the self-revelation of life. One explained the other in the form of a hermeneutical relationship of part to whole. These broader perspectives gave the phenomena of the face and the flesh their proper meaning. In dissertation we ask—can one also see such a broader perspective in Marion’s case which, as a whole, would establish the possibility of interpreting its parts?

Secondly, one should ask about a certain paradoxicality of the “counter-method” itself, i.e., the very possibility of the above described “turn.” Michel Henry, referring to the principle of the phenomenology of donation—“so much reduction, so much givenness”—points to a problem which, if we may say so, is linked to excellence of this principle. For while givenness is the source of manifestation, then appearance is “appearance of the appearance.” For how can any structure or model be imposed on this process? The reduction here seems to be approaching the “limit,” beyond which it “paradoxically” returns to the starting point. That is why the reduction, working from and towards the paradoxical principle of givenness, also turns out to be paradoxical. Reduction is not, therefore, a method understood as a way of allowing a phenomenon to appear (or not only as such), but rather as a way back (according to the etymology: *re-ducere*), as an “intermediary”—from a phenomenon already given, but not yet received in its givenness, not appearing from itself, to the auto-manifestation of the phenomenon.

Thirdly, saturated phenomena require hermeneutics, interpretation and thus language mediation. For Marion, hermeneutics essentially identifies itself with reduction that reinterprets phenomena originally declared to be objects or beings as events, because originally given. It

should therefore be noted—which is far from obvious—that the phenomenology of givenness cannot start with reduction, in the sense that reduction would make the phenomena appear (as transcendental phenomenology does). Phenomenology of givenness must start with an unreduced givenness (or pre-reduced, interpreted) i.e. hermeneutical presumptions. This first approach to phenomena is an original call, although at the same time it is already a response (in which the call is beginning to appear)—a response which, starting from a paradox, sets in motion reduction and hermeneutics, pursuing their given meaning.

The goal of the thesis, therefore, is to describe the concept of truth as revelation and, at the same time, to trace the path followed by Marion's thought, along the line of paradox—the broadening of rationality—the turn. The related research problem, imposed by our goal, is the question of the possibility of the turn of reduction, that is, the attempt to measure the resistance to which, perhaps in full accordance with the assumptions of the phenomenology of donation, the reduction encounters on its way to donation. The research hypothesis of our work is therefore the assumption of at least partial impossibility of the turn of reduction. The effects of the resistance encountered in the attempt to return the reduction seem to change Marion's phenomenology itself over time.

In the first part of the dissertation we reconstruct these paradoxes, i.e. the phenomena which, contrary to the conditions of *a priori* cognition, are given to thinking. Marion, on the one hand, in his studies of Descartes philosophy, points to the limits of modern metaphysics, on the other hand, in reference to Pascal, already points to their transgression through the “order of love.” These issues are described in chapter one. In the second chapter, we ask about the theological sources of Marion's thought, especially in relation to Barth and Balthasar. Marion, outlines the idolatry of God's (and love's) thinking within the framework of metaphysics and—initially rather negatively—the possibility of their thinking outside of metaphysics, for example, in the phenomenon of the icon and the notion of distance. These key issues for the development of Marion's phenomenology are described in chapter three. In the fourth chapter we present Marion's polemic with Heidegger thinking of God.

In the second part of the thesis, it was necessary to address, in the fifth chapter, the theme of the “theological turn” in phenomenology, the specificity of the “new French phenomenology,” and Marion's reference to those issues that ask about the limits of phenomenology itself. Then, in chapter six, we describe Marion's phenomenology of donation. So we first present the role of truth in phenomenology—especially in Husserl and Heidegger. Next, we analyse the phenomenology of donation itself. The development of the concept of saturated phenomena allows Marion to place within the framework of the phenomenology of

donation such key phenomenological themes as the body, the face of the Other (icon), visibility as an idol, the eventness of the phenomena, the “phenomenology of the unapparent” and the possibility of maximum phenomenality in revelation.

The broadening of rationality is done in two steps. On the one hand, the reduction is to lead to a donation, on the other hand, when it reaches it, it is to disappear in order not to overshadow the thing itself. Since the donation is both the beginning and the end of the process of reduction, it can be said that the culmination of the reduction is the turn. In the third part of the work we describe this turn, which for Marion is an opportunity to describe the phenomena of love and revelation with the help of the phenomenology of donation. So first, in chapter seven, we describe the “erotic phenomenon.” In the case of love, love itself is also a condition of knowledge. Moreover, love becomes a universal condition of the possibility of cognition in the form of “erotic truth.” If, however, the condition of the possibility of recognising the givenness is love, then the question should also be asked about a possible final interpretation of the “meaning of givenness” as love, and whether such an interpretation, though originating from the phenomenology of givenness (*and* theology), nevertheless in a certain sense does not exceed it (without, however, denying it) by combining two threads—theological and philosophical. The concept of truth as revelation, which we describe in chapter eight, is based both on Marion’s theological works and on his phenomenology of donation and the concept of “erotic truth.” We describe the new concept of truth, understood as the revelation. We are also trying to demonstrate, starting from Marion’s analysis, that the notion of truth as revelation may be the answer to the questions posed by Heidegger, who follows the thread of interpretation of truth understood as *aletheia*.

Finally, in chapter nine, we try to assess the research problem related to the “turn of reduction” and the role of hermeneutics in the phenomenology of donation. Ultimately, the tension caused by the impossible requirement of the “counter-method” leads Marion to a certain reformulation of this requirement and to its new interpretation in the light of description of the phenomena of love and revelation.